



**Microwave antenna installation at the Government Hill site near Miles City. See related story on page 2.**  
(Photo by Tom Dunne, Dunne Communications)

## Statewide Interoperability Governing Board Meeting Report

Angie Mullikin, Grants Program Bureau Chief in Disaster and Emergency Services (DES), gave a grant status report at the beginning of the Statewide Interoperability Governing Board (SIGB) meeting on Tues., April 10 in Helena. She reported that grant allocations were proposed for NE Billings and Broadwater County site planning grants and Lewis and Clark County system management. All of these projects are based on existing funding streams. Angie also informed the board that parts and equipment for the Public Safety Interoperable Communications (PSIC) Strategic Technology Reserve (STR) have been identified.

Angie also reported on the applications DES received for Dept. of Homeland Security (DHS) FY12 funding related to communications projects. Warren Dupuis, Statewide Interoperability Coordinator (SWIC), said the SIGB Technical Working Group will be reviewing these applications and SIGB board members will make a recommendation to the Senior Advisory Committee (SAC) on the priorities for funding grants to communications projects. SIGB members will also be reviewing the narrowband equipment applications for DHS FY09 funds following a review by members of the SIGB Technical Working Group. The SIGB approved a motion to execute the grant funding plan, located at this [link](#).

Dick Clark, Montana's Chief Information Officer, gave a detailed report on a D-Block Implementation Roundtable meeting he attended that was hosted by the National Governor's Association. The Public Safety

Communications Spectrum Act was signed into law, which establishes the First Responder Network Authority (FirstNet) as an independent authority within the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA). The Act directs FirstNet to take "all actions" needed to ensure the construction, deployment and operation of a Nationwide Public Safety Broadband Network (NPSBN) and reallocates the 700 MHz "D Block" section of the spectrum from commercial to public safety use. FirstNet will hold the single public safety broadband wireless license.

Dick emphasized that the bill is on a fast track for implementation, and he explained the "opt-out" provision of the bill, which means that the State of Montana can choose to participate in the deployment of the NPSBN as proposed by FirstNet or the Governor will have to submit an alternative plan for construction, maintenance and operation of a state network that would be interoperable with the national network.

Warren gave an in-depth presentation on the implementation of the Public Safety Communications Spectrum Act, reporting that NTIA will establish requirements by Aug. 22, 2012 for the \$135 million in planning grant funding that is provided for in the Act. In addition to the planning grant funding, the Act directs \$7 billion in funding to FirstNet to construct, deploy and operate the NPSBN. In preparation, states are being urged to begin updating their Statewide Communications Interoperability Plans (SCIP) to incorporate broadband technologies and ensure that SIGB membership includes appropriate state and local representatives. A link to the entire presentation is [here](#). Board members expressed a desire to have this subject be a regular agenda item.

Carl Hotvedt, SWIC office, gave a project status report, indicating that work is continuing on resolving access issues at the Centennial site, which is key to implementing portions of the Border Interoperability Demonstration Project grant. Another option is development of the Big John site, but it lacks power and would need road development work.

Major Tom Butler, Montana Highway Patrol and Chair of the SIGB Technical Working Group, reported that the April meeting was canceled due to poor weather conditions, but the group was able to participate in a conference call on a tower issue and communicate effectively via email to arrive at a decision that has now been implemented. Easement issues at the Hysham site are still pending, and legal assistance from the Dept. of Transportation, which has more experience in this area, was secured.

Beaverhead County Commissioner and SIGB Legislative Working Group Chair Mike McGinley said

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the group has drafted a rough version of a bill to codify the role, responsibility, and authority of the SIGB and to secure funding for the long-term operation and maintenance of the statewide public safety communications system.

Roger Smith, Lewis and Clark County, presented a detailed account of activities he has been involved in over the past month, including working with the FBI to connect sites in northeast Montana to the FBI dispatch center in Salt Lake City, assisting with planning for connecting the Master Controller in Helena to the Eastern Zone 2 Controller in Richland County, and conducting site walks on the Eastern Microwave Build-Out Project.

The next SIGB meeting is set for Tues., May 8 in Room 172 of the State Capitol beginning at 10:00 am. Agenda items should be provided to [Warren Dupuis](#). Here is the [link](#) for next month's agenda and meeting materials.

## Montana Plan to Complete NECP Goal # 2 Reporting Approved

Montana's plan to increase county reporting on progress towards achieving the National Emergency Communications Plan Goal # 2 has been approved by the Office of Emergency Communications (OEC). In a letter dated April 12, 2012, OEC Director Chris Essid said that Montana's proposed methodology was determined to be a "valid approach for assessing and collecting performance and capability data" for Montana's remaining counties.

As *Heard Across Montana* readers may recall, the NECP Goal 2 focuses on the demonstration of response-level emergency communications by all counties or communities during day-to-day or routine incidents. Montana counties need to report on both their response-level emergency communications capabilities and performance abilities.

Montana's plan focuses on increasing awareness about the need for and importance of reporting, working closing with DES staff for assistance in collecting the data and holding workshops to explain and assist with reporting. E. Wing Spooner,



**Kudos go to John Pisk, Prairie County DES, and Bonnie Ostertag, Judith Basin County DES, for submitting both their NECP Goal # 2 County Capabilities and Performance Data Reports!**  
**Way to Go!**

Public Safety Services Bureau, will be coordinating many of these outreach and training efforts on behalf of the SWIC Office.

As a result of this approval, OEC will soon be working to begin scoping and scheduling Montana's OEC-sponsored Technical Assistance requests.

For more information and links to the survey instruments, please click [here](#).

## State Agency Radio Users Task Force Meeting

Members of the State Agency Radio Users Task Force met Tues. March 29. Updates on the Statewide Interoperability Governing Board (SIGB) Technical Working Group and changes in state-licensed marine channels were provided.

Chair Mike Stapp, DES, reported that Memoranda of Understanding (MOU) are needed if federal dollars will be used to purchase narrowband radio equipment that will be used by multiple entities. Whoever uses the equipment has to have an MOU with the owner. DES is addressing this issue.

All VHF frequency license for the Departments of Corrections; Fish, Wildlife and Parks; Livestock; Natural Resources and Conservation and the Montana Highway Patrol (MHP) have been updated to both wide and narrowband emissions. Mutual Aid frequencies will be moved to narrowband on Oct. 1, 2012. MHP will be converting to narrowbanding district by district starting this summer. This process necessitates re-programming all radios. PSSB continues to offer free assistance to public-safety agencies with conversion of their FCC licenses to cover narrowband requirements. It was noted that some rural fire departments have already started communicating in narrowband mode prior to the agree-upon narrowband conversion date of Oct. 1, 2012 without involving other public-safety agencies.

Mike reported that Dept. of Transportation surplus radios that are not narrowband capable were able to be modified to operate on the amateur radio band. Since amateur radio users are not required to narrowband their frequencies at this time, the radios can still be put to good use.

The next meeting is set for Tues., April 17 from 2:30-4:00 pm in Room 160 of the Mitchell Building.

## Site Walks Completed on the Eastern Microwave Build-Out Project

Nine site-walk inspections were completed the week of April 2 on the Eastern Microwave Build-Out Project. Roger Smith, Lewis and Clark County, reported that it was probably the best site-walk process he has ever participated in, and he commended the contractors on their work. Only a few minor punch list items remain to be addressed.

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According to Dave Clouse, Project Manager, the crew was re-deployed this week to the Hathaway site—which is about 80% complete—to finalize work at the site by the April 13 target date. The antenna and microwave equipment at the Hathaway site have been installed; power connection and the rectifier remain to be installed. Path alignment work between the Government Hill and Hathaway sites also is scheduled for April 13.

The hop at the Government Hill site is functioning, but concern still exist about high wind affects on the tower. A field engineer performed new microwave path surveys and data calculations and determined that the path is at five 9's reliability. A tower study has been ordered to verify tower and antenna stability. In the meantime, Roger will analyze performance data and compare it against weather data to determine if the microwave path fades due tower movement. If so, tower guying will be needed.

The eastern microwave system is now ready to connect the Northern Tier trunked sites at Culberson, Plentywood and Scobey to the Eastern Zone 2 Controller in Richland County. T-1 circuits are mapped and ready for long-term testing.

Roger is scheduled to meet with sub-contractors next week to integrate equipment and software updates to facilitate network monitoring of the microwave system.

## Webinar Examines Storm Activity and Potential Impacts to Montana Infrastructure

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA)'s National Weather Service-Great Falls, the Space Weather Prediction Center and Montana DES are offering a webinar on Wed., May 2, from 9 to 10 am. The session will examine solar storm activity and potential impacts on communications networks and other vulnerable infrastructure in high-latitude locations such as Montana. The Space



Weather Prediction Center provides real-time monitoring and forecasting of solar and geophysical events.

Webinar links are limited, so interested participants are urged to register in advance.

Reserve your spot by clicking [here](#).

## Upcoming Meetings

- **Tues., April 17: State Agency Radio Users Task Force**  
Helena • 2:30 - 4:00 pm  
Mitchell Building, 125 N. Roberts, Rm. 160
- **Thurs., April 19: I-15/90 Corridor Consortium**  
Butte • 10:00 am - noon  
Chamber of Commerce  
1000 George St.
- **Wed., April 25: SIGB Technical Working Group**  
Billings • 1:00 - 5:00 pm  
Billings Fire Station #1 - Training Rm.  
2305 8th Ave. North
- **Thurs., May 3: Northern Tier Consortium**  
Havre • 10:00 am - 12:30 pm  
Hill County Detention Center  
Courtroom Mtg. Area  
1450 2<sup>nd</sup> St. West
- **Tues., May 8: Statewide Interoperability Governing Board (SIGB)**  
Helena • 10:00 am - noon  
State Capitol, Room 172  
[http://itsd.mt.gov/policy/councils/sigb/05082012\\_meeting.mcp](http://itsd.mt.gov/policy/councils/sigb/05082012_meeting.mcp)